

Committee on Resources

Witness Testimony

Testimony on HR 1739 and HR 2149
JOHN A. SMREKAR
Before the
House of Representatives
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
September 9, 1997

Dear Members of the Committee on Resources Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

I speak in favor of the Senator Rod Grams, and Congressman Jim Oberstar bills pertaining to the Boundary Water Canoe Area Wilderness.

As of this date, I am just about one month away from my 85th birthday. I have been in this controversy since 1929. I have accumulated some 68 consecutive years of history, experience, knowledge, background of a unique area --- first the Roadless Area and now the BWCAW.

History will show that the BWCAW is not a primitive area. Unique, yes, but not primitive. Activities over the years, first the Roadless Area., and now the BWCAW: mining, logging, railroads, prospecting, mechanized equipment, roads, resorts, cabins, homes, motors, snowmobiles, fur trading, people lived there all year long with their families. It is not a primitive area. Primitive means: of or existing in the beginning, original state, untrammelled by man. It should not be referred to as primitive.

The reason that the BWCAW is such a unique area is because the area people provided excellent stewardship. They helped fight fires, replanted trees, kept it clean; yes, mostly all volunteer work. They have earned and deserve better than what the present law provides.

It was never the intent of congress to keep people out of the BWCAW. Restrictions have gone far beyond the intentions of the legislators who shaped its early years.

In 1930, The Shipstead, Newton, Noland Bill was passed to protect the shorelines of lakes and streams on federal lands within the Superior National Forest. However, language was added to the law whereby any timber on these shorelines that was insect infested or blown down could be removed by setting up logging camps, mechanized skidways to utilize the timber and clean the area up under good forest management practices

1948 Thye-Blatnik Bill (Public Law 733')... \$500,000.00 was appropriated to buy land within the Roadless Area (now the BWCAW). Language was added to the bill (an understanding) .."Any structure or structures suitable for human occupancy could not be condemned. This applied to resorts, cabins or homes in the area. Purpose: resorts, homes cabins could stay.

The 1964 Wilderness Act that put the BWCA into the National Wilderness Preservation System grandfathered the use of motorboats and logging Although, environmentalists opposed that part of the bill,

Senator Hubert Humphrey helped persuade them to accept it.

Senator Humphrey also promised to appear before the congressional Conference Committee that was working on the 1978 legislation. He wanted to set the record straight and assure the committee that he promised the area people that the 1964 Wilderness Bill was AS FAR AS HE WOULD GO. He was a sick man at that time. If he had lived to appear before the committee, his testimony would have made the difference. His word was his bond, ...a legacy which should be honored and respected

You can't dispute BWCAW HISTORY. It is time to reevaluate. Lets work together with an eye to the future and adopt plan of action to build for tomorrow!

John A. Smrekar

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